

## CHAPTER 4

REPORT ON THE 1984 EXCAVATIONS  
CHAPEL GROUP 528-531

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**4.1 Introduction**

Part of this season's resources was devoted to continuing the re-clearance of certain of the chapels excavated in 1921. As noted already in the Preface, the team allocated to this began with Chapel 522. The intention was to continue with the adjacent Chapel 521, but this was abandoned when it became clear that most of this building had been obliterated by modern digging. An entirely fresh site was therefore chosen: the group of chapels numbered 528 to 531. Re-clearing these occupied this particular digging team for the remainder of the season. The reason for the choice lay with Chapel 528. On the old plan (*COA I*: Plate XXIV) the layout of 528 differs markedly from all others. In particular, the lines of stones in the forecourt suggested that perhaps a T-shaped basin had been present.

In the event, the re-clearance of 528 added sufficient fresh detail to alter radically its overall appearance. The old plan, small though it is, is reasonably accurate, but at the time it was made the building had not been thoroughly cleared, so that important details remained hidden. On completing the re-excavation of 528, it seemed only logical to move on to Chapels 529 to 531 so that the complete group to which 528 belongs could be planned as a single complex.

**4.2 Building 528**

The ground for Building 528 (as for the adjacent Chapel 529) is a terrace partly cut into the southern flank of the hillside. At its maximum the cutting is about 1.10 metres deep. The surface of the terrace itself slopes down slightly from north to south, by about 25-30 cms. Bedrock is a mixture of soft marl and compacted sand. The north-west corner area had been protected by a short length of wall constructed above and behind the face of the cutting [1285].

The building stood within a courtyard, measuring about 8 x 7.50 metres (Figure 4.2). Of the south wall [1293] only a foundation course survived. Being of only a single course in thickness and without a buttress it may never have stood to any significant height, but served only as a boundary. The courtyard was entered from the west, over a brick threshold [1296] between jambs [1294, 1295]. A path had been laid to the gateway, but only a short portion of this was cleared. It consisted of narrow parallel walls of stones and mortar [1291, 1292], bordering a surface of packed marl [1290].

The principal feature of the building is a long narrow bench [1302, 1303], occupying the whole of the northern side (Figure 4.4). Its preserved height

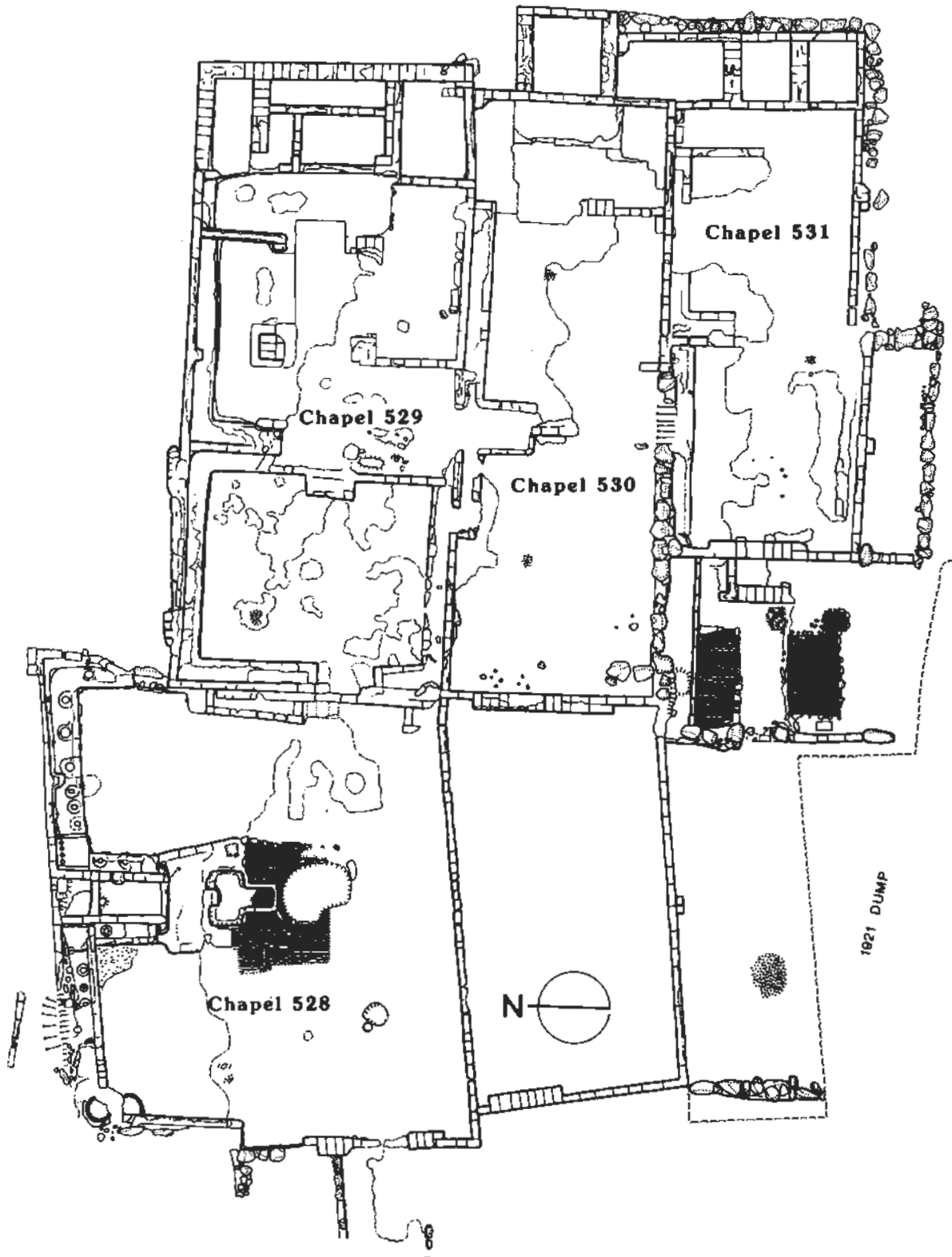


Figure 4.1. General outline plan of Chapels 528-531.

varies between 52 and 56 cms. The rear wall [1304] was built against the rock face, and hence slopes back slightly. Two buttresses [1305, 1306] helped to support it, as did the walls [1307, 1308] of the central projection. The benches



Figure 4.2. General view of Chapel 528, looking north.

had a filling of sand and marl. The central projection now consists of a pair of empty compartments between the walls [1307, 1308], wall [1309] subdividing them. Two short benches [1311, 1312] are built against the projection. It is impossible to tell how much brickwork or filling was removed during the 1921 excavation. The upper courses of walls [1307] and [1308], however, had been laid at a distinct angle from the horizontal, as if they had formed sloping walls flanking a central ramp or staircase. All that Peet and Woolley (*COA I*: 105) have to say of this part is: "Against the north wall at its centre is a solid block of masonry which once held the lower and upper niches, now almost destroyed. Sunk in this block is a vase 30 cm. in diameter." This description implies a solid fill in the compartments, which the excavators must have removed, just as they removed the floors of the shrines of Chapels 529-531 (see below). The vase is not illustrated, nor is a type specified, nor does it appear on the plan. A width of 30 cms. is almost half the width of the compartments. The simplest explanation is that the southern compartment contained a staircase, flanked by

1984 excavation

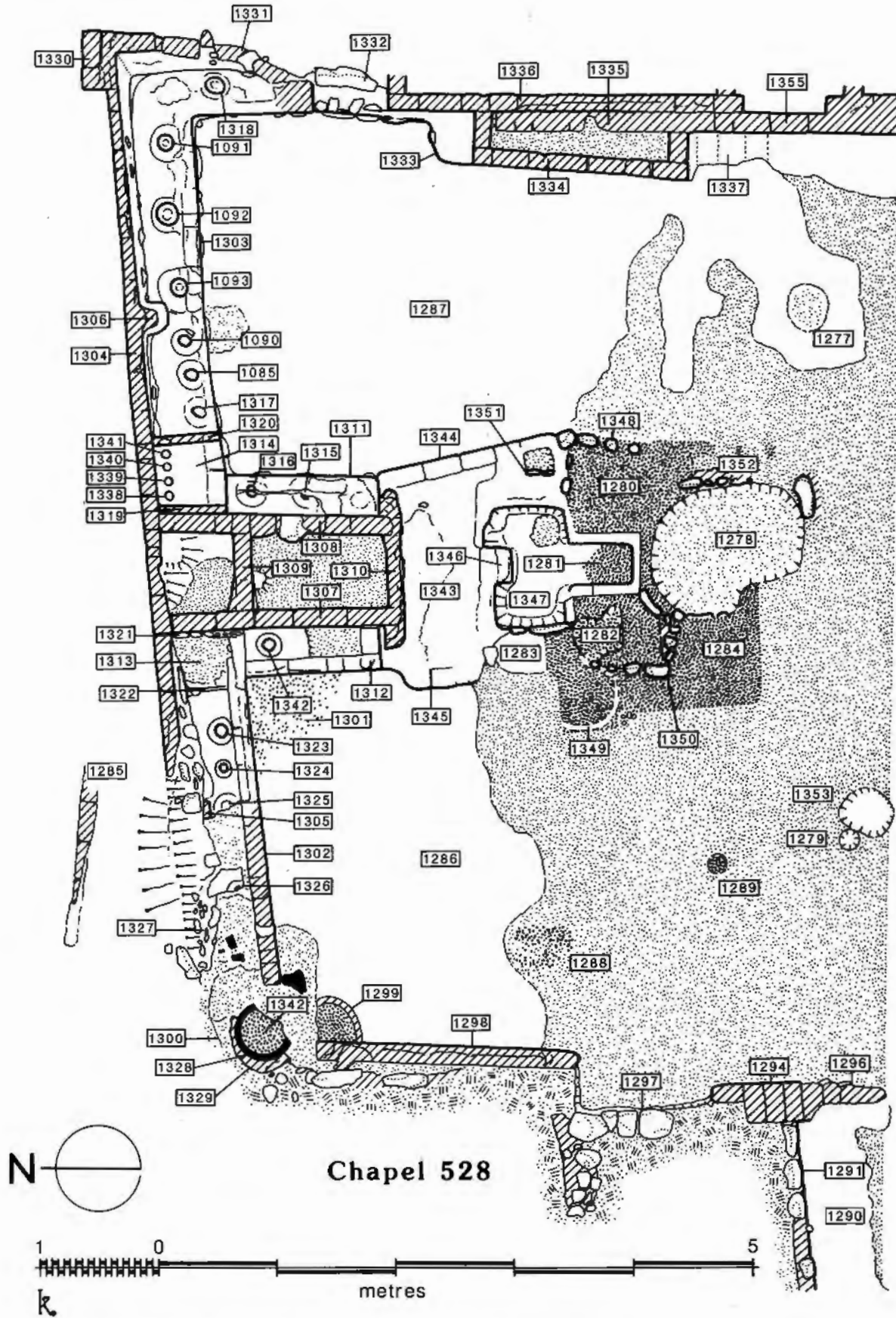


Figure 4.3. Detail plan of the main part of Chapel 528.

low balustrades on top of walls [1307] and [1308], leading to a square platform over the northern compartment, into which the large "vase" was set. Peet and Woolley used the word "vase" as an occasional variant of "jar" (e.g. *COA I*: 140-41). It is no guide to the specific type they had in mind.

The effect of the projection is to create two separate areas of the courtyard, each surrounded on three sides by benches (although some doubt must remain as to whether a bench closed the western side of the western area. The top of wall [1298] has been eroded away). Where the tops of these benches are preserved a distinctive treatment is everywhere apparent.



Figure 4.4. Bench with receptacles in the eastern part of Chapel 528, looking west.

The eastern set of benches is the better preserved (Figure 4.4). The main length of bench [1303] runs along most of the north side, and then continues for a short distance on the east. The fill of the bench had been covered first with a firm layer of marl mortar, this had then been plastered with a thin skim of Nile mud, and finally coated with gypsum. In the course of laying the surface

#### 1984 excavation

of the bench a series of circular receptacles had been fashioned from the marl mortar, each one provided with a raised rim. The rims and the interiors had, like the bench surface, been coated with Nile mud mortar and gypsum plaster. On this bench there were seven. Three [1317, 1085, 1090] were set closely together and were shallower than the others [1093, 1092, 1091, 1318]. On the west side of this area a short separate length of bench [1311] stood against the central projection, and probably supported two receptacles [1315, 1316], although the top of the bench was somewhat denuded. Lying in a corner against the rear wall [1304] and the central projection [1308] was a square, box-like construction [1314], 12 cms. above the bench level (Figure 4.5). It had its own narrow side walls [1319, 1320], constructed of small flat stones set upright in marl mortar. It reproduces in miniature the bench tops. At the back is a row of four tiny circular receptacles [1338-1341], probably originally with raised edges. The whole had been coated with Nile mud and gypsum plaster, although much of the original surface had been lost to erosion.



Figure 4.5. The brick "box" [1314] with small receptacles in Chapel 528.

The set of benches on the west side of the central projection was less well preserved, but seems to have duplicated the set on the east, more or less. On the main bench on the north side [1302], remains of four receptacles are preserved [1323-1326]; on the east side, against the central projection, the bench [1312] preserves only one [1342], but much of the bench surface has been lost. In the angle between the two benches are traces from a counterpart to the square box on the opposite side of the central projection. All that survives are parts of the two narrow side walls of mortar and flat stones [1321, 1322] flanking a square area of sand and mortar [1313].

The one place where the western area differed from the eastern is on the west. The western wall [1298] stands forward from the general line of the courtyard, but too much of the upper part is missing to reveal if the top part was finished off as a bench with at least some receptacles. The initial excavation of 1921 revealed the circular oven [1328] standing in a gap in the north-west corner. It was identified as belonging "probably to later arrangements" (*COA I*: 105). When re-cleared it was found still in a fair state of preservation. It consists of a standard cylindrical clay lining [1328] around which a thick layer of marl mortar [1329] had been plastered. It had no real floor, except for a thin layer of fine grey ash [1342].

The oven stands within a roughly circular cutting in the bedrock of the hillside [1300]. Despite the general damage to the walls of the bench in this part, the cutting must have included the end of the bench, and Peet was clearly justified in seeing the oven as a later addition or intrusion. An important new fact appeared on the very last day of work at the site, however. A further brushing of the floor [1286] revealed near the north-west corner the outline of an earlier fire-place [1299]. No time remained to obtain more than the outline oval plan and the fact that it was buried in ash. But unlike the oven [1328] it is clearly part of the original structure, and seems itself to have been partly destroyed by the oven cutting [1300]. The importance of this discovery is to show that cooking was one original aspect of Building 528. Oven [1328] was merely a replacement. Two further deposits of ash occur in the area: one [1301] overlying the floor, the other [1288], a very slight one, on the sand beyond the line where the floor was preserved.

In the centre of Building 528 lay a patch of dark earth, stones and bricks which appears in outline in Newton's plan of 1921 (*COA I*: Plate XXIV) and provided part of the initial impetus for re-clearance. As now revealed it is basically a garden containing a T-shaped basin, and is apparently part of the original construction. It is also the product of more than one phase of activity, the sequence of which has been somewhat obscured by holes which may have been dug by Peet's workmen in 1921, and perhaps also by burrowing animals.

The area is linked to the central projection by a small area of pavement [1343] edged by a single line of bricks on east and west [1344, 1345]. It runs to the edge of a T-shaped basin [1347] with edging of brick which includes a quay-like projection [1346]. The basin is 25 cms. deep. In front of the basin spreads an area of almost black alluvial soil [1280, 1281]. Two holes [1278, 1282] have been dug into it, probably in modern times. This soil provided the basis for a garden, subdivided into small irregular plots, in one case by a line of mortar

[1349], and in others by stones [1348, 1350, 1352]. The precise temporal relationships of the various parts require further ground study, but one is clear: the soil was used also to fill up the T-shaped basin. Peet's men had removed part of it, but a deposit still remained at the southern end [1281]. The temporary usage of T-shaped basins is something encountered in previous seasons. Others found in the past had been deliberately filled with soil or with a mixture of mortar and rubble.

On the ground in the courtyard were other features: a small and shallow circular patch of Nile mud [1289], two circular holes [1279, 1353], and a shallow circular patch of compacted ground [1277]. The last three may represent places where vessels had stood.

The remaining part of Building 528 to be described is the east side, which also formed the front wall to Chapel 529. This side contained a separate exit to the north side of Chapel 529, over a step of stones set in mortar [1332]. The west wall of Chapel 529 is [1336]. This seems to have replaced another wall which ran adjacent to its course [1335], which had been reduced to its foundations. The elongated enclosure [1334], which might have been the foundations for another bench, was built across its line. Two bricks at right-angles to each other [1354] in the south-east corner of the courtyard may represent the remains of a small bench or enclosure on the far side of the entrance to Chapel 529 [1355]. The floor level inside the outer hall of Chapel 529 had been raised in antiquity by about 10 cms. In conjunction with this a ramp had been added over the entrance threshold [1355], consisting of a line of bricks plastered over with marl mortar [1337], and found in a very eroded condition.

#### 4.3 Chapel 529

The re-excavation of the interiors of Chapels 529 to 531 produced no surprises, and calls for no extensive comment in this report. The whole group of chapels is stepped down the hillside on shallow terraces. The effect of this has been to preserve the north of each chapel much better than the south. The chapels seem generally designed to have been symmetrical about their main axis, so that we are reasonably justified in restoring to the south sides the main features recovered on the north.

In the case of 529, as Peet and Woolley mention (*COA I*: 105), it was unusually well provided with benches, apparently around four sides of the Outer Hall, and three sides of the Inner. One feature missed in 1921 was that the Outer Hall had been refloored at a level about 10 cms. above the first floor, and this had protected much of the original marl mortar floor. It contained a burnt patch, well off-centre, presumably from a charcoal hearth. In the Inner Hall the roof had been supported on two square brick pillars which, at foundation level, had been joined to the north and south walls of the Hall by a wall consisting of a single line of bricks. Only the southern one is exposed as a consequence of the progressively greater denudation to the south.

The rear of the Inner Hall probably had the form of a screen wall on either side of a doorway between two more brick piers. The door led to a Sanctuary consisting of shrines and side rooms behind a transverse corridor. The floor of



the corridor was higher than the floor of the Inner Hall by about 14 cms. Comparison with the plan of the Sanctuary given in the original excavation report (COA I: Plate XXIV) reveals significant differences, the reason being that subsequent to the plan having been made most of the floors were taken up. Many of the walls which create internal divisions on our plan belong only to the foundation structure, and were covered by the floor. The central part had contained a platform reached by a flight of steps, of which nothing remained at all.

Peet (COA I: 105) mentions traces of a painted scene on the north buttress of the screen wall separating the Sanctuary from the Inner Hall. Our own re-clearance brought to light two small fragments of painted mud plaster fallen into the foundations of the Sanctuary. One is from a human face, the other from a scheme of decoration known from this year's excavations in the Main Chapel: a trellis and vine pattern. Although the fragments on their own are very humble, they imply that wall areas of Chapel 529 were decorated with painted scenes which included human figures, and in their scope they may have represented an equivalent density of decoration to that in the Main Chapel. In other words, the preserved parts of these chapels probably give us a very impoverished impression of their original appearance.

#### 4.4 Chapel 530

Although little survives of the structure it was apparently well provided with benches. Behind the Inner Hall lay an Ante-room before the Sanctuary, separated from the Inner Hall by only a low step, without screen wall. The roof was at this point supported on two brick piers. As in Chapel 529 the foundations of the piers were linked to the side walls by a single line of bricks, which also formed an edge to the step. The Ante-room contained a low brick platform, coated with gypsum plaster, in front of the square Sanctuary. In the floor debris of both the Inner and Outer Halls were small burnt patches.

The arrangement of the walls at the Sanctuary end also shows that Chapel 530 was added to the already existing Chapel 529. At its western end it possessed its own courtyard, built probably as part of the courtyard to 528, since, as noted above, it is unlikely that the dividing wall stood to any significant height.

#### 4.5 Chapel 531

This denuded Chapel was a later addition to the whole group, without direct access to Building 528. Its relative position in the building sequence is revealed by the wall alignments at the east end. This part also demonstrates a divergent building technique: the eastern and southern walls had been buttressed on the outside by a continuous bank of stones set in mortar. Large stones had also been used for the foundations of a small annexe on the south side of the chapel.

The ground in front of the chapel held an interesting discovery. The entrance had been preceded by a small porch [1356]. A path [1357] had led up to this, via a gateway [1358] in an enclosure wall [1359, 1360] (Figures 4.6, 4.7). The path had run between two small garden plots [1275, 1276] made from dark alluvial

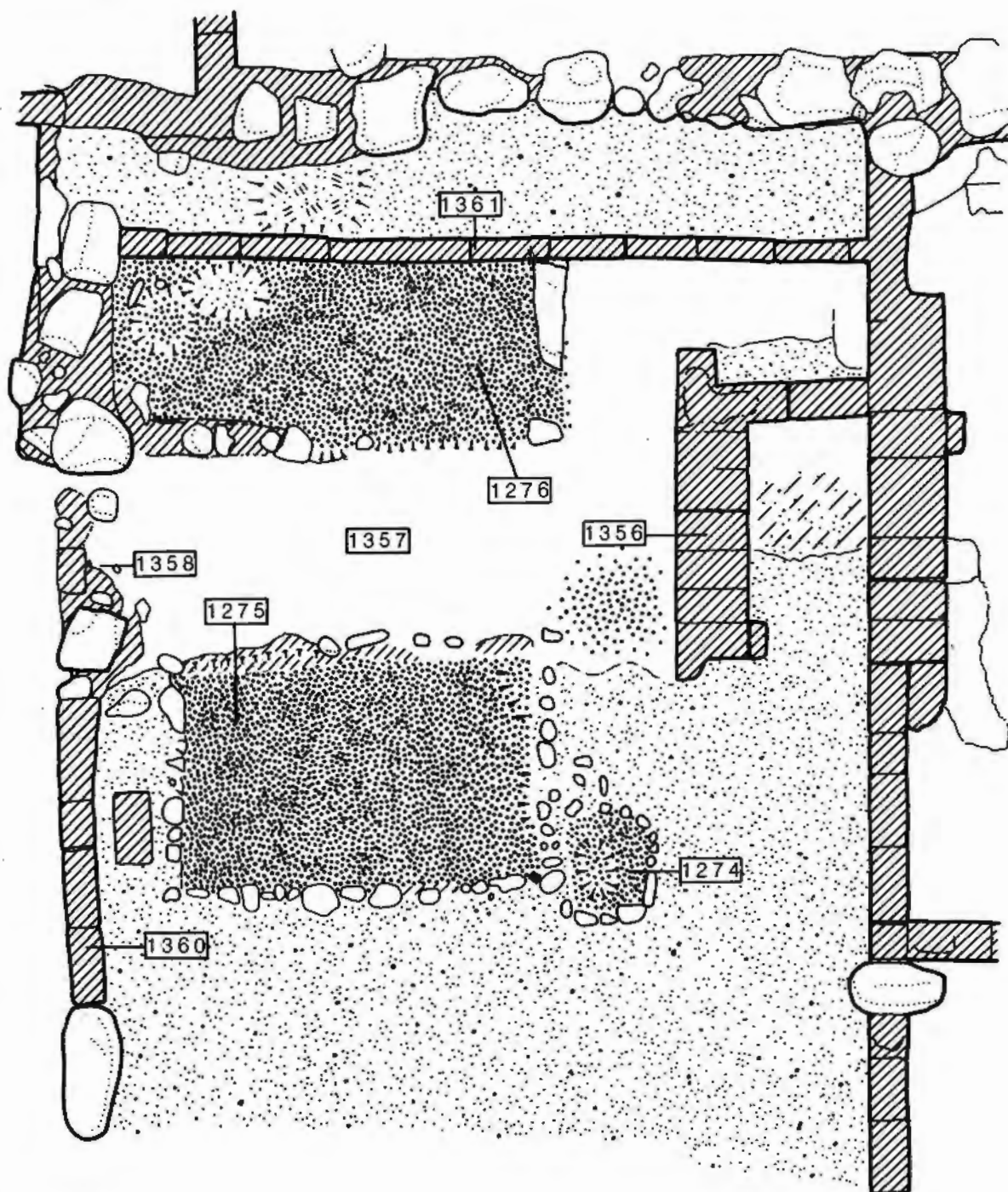


Figure 4.6. Detail plan of the garden in front of Chapel 531.

soil surrounded by little walls of stones and marl mortar. A small individual plot [1274] had been added to the southern garden. The whole area had been bordered on the north by a low wall [1361] consisting of bricks set on edge; on the southern side erosion had removed all traces of a border.

The ground in front of the garden enclosure had also been enclosed. The beginning of the west wall to an outer enclosure was found continuing the line of the western side of Building 528. It continues southwards beneath the 1921 dump. In the middle of the enclosed space lay a thin ashy patch.



Figure 4.7. The porch and garden in front of Chapel 531, looking west.

#### 4.6 Discussion

The buildings numbered 528 to 531 form a complete group, interrelated by architecture and well separated from others. The context thus more or less excludes the possibility that any part of the group was used communally by the villagers in general. The group has all the appearance of a discrete and private set of buildings. Three of the buildings are chapels of a fairly standardised design, but no. 528 gives to the group a distinctive character. None of the other groups excavated by Peet and Woolley appears to have anything similar to offer, although more re-clearances might uncover features distinctive to them. The group 551-554, 556 looks the most promising in this respect (*COA I*: Plate XXV). Individuality of layout, in implying individuality in religious practices, is an interesting fact in itself, although not a greatly surprising one in view of the great variety of structures in the tomb and chapel areas at Deir el-Medina.

The provision of gardens in 528 and 531 and the T-shaped basin in 528 illustrates practices already known from tomb-paintings (the Ramesside tomb of Userhet providing the best-known example: Davies 1927: 15-19, Plates I, X) and, in the case of the basins, from our own previous seasons at the Village. Where the group takes on a unique character is in the main part of the structure of building 528: the benches with their receptacles and the central projection which may have originally supported a staircase and platform. How did people use it? The most critical element concerns the receptacles. What purpose did they serve? One possibility that can be excluded is that they were jar-stands. Several are too close together for supporting storage vessels of any size, and several have been made, in this context, pointlessly deep. They seem to have been made to hold substances within them. Remembering that originally they were coated inside and around the rim with a layer of gypsum, the choice lies between food and ritual liquids (even water) or oils. In support of the former one should take note of the presence of ovens in the north-west corner. However, on sheer grounds of practicality, the latter is more realistic. Were, perhaps, the receptacles filled from water stored in the jar which Peet found in place in the central projection?

It is hard, too, to find parallels that are likely to be relevant. From the North Suburb at Amarna one can cite a limestone block with a row of three receptacles carved in the top (*COA II*: 25, Plate XX.3, and cf. Plate XII). This was found loose on the floor of a room beside the bathroom of a large house (T.36.11), and was said to contain "traces of grease". Amidst the plans of buildings in the main chapel area at Deir el-Medina is one which might offer some similarity, if one could be sure of interpreting it correctly (Bruyère 1948: Plan 3, building between tombs P. 1422 and P. 1426; cf. p. 119). But even then it would tell us nothing about its purpose.

Ignorance of how the building was used should not be allowed, however, to conceal the general significance already mentioned: by its very uniqueness amongst several groups of chapels it points to the existence of a group of people - presumably related families - with their own distinctive pattern of religious observance. Their beliefs may have been commonplace, but their mode of observance seems to have been that of an individual group tradition. This possibility increases the justification for re-clearing more of the chapels to look for further examples of diversity.